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AUTHOR Amrein, Audrey
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the way in which some schools are redefining the community-school link and discusses research on schools offering services to the community. It describes how social services provided by schools affect education and the extent to which schools that take an ecological approach to schooling provide a sense of efficacy and empowerment among needy children and their families. A historical discussion presents key moments in history and policy that have influenced the evolution of social service schools. Next, the paper discusses the current status of American schools in promoting health and well-being. The numerous benefits of using schools as a hub for community-based services are noted, including greater access to, and ongoing contact with, students; better data on and knowledge of the students; and empowerment of students and families to become involved in the community and in schooling. Barriers to success of outreach programs include inability to radically change the community's weak economic base; belief that schools should not be responsible for anything but learning; political, governance, and stakeholder issues; and sustainability. Considerable research suggests that these programs are truly enhancing the academic and personal lives of disadvantaged students, though some research has indicated that little evidence has been found to support these claims. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

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School Support Programs:

Implications for School Leadership

and the

Empowerment of Economically Disadvantaged Students

By: Audrey Amrein

Arizona State University

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A. Amrein

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Abstract

It's 7 a.m., and Intermediate School 218 is open for breakfast. Before school officially begins, students play sports or attend classes in dance and Latin band. Located in a new building in Washington Heights, the school offers students a choice of five self-contained academies: Business, Community Service, Expressive Arts, Ethics and Law, or Mathematics, Science and Technology. A store in the school's attractive lobby sells supplies for students.

At the Family Resource Center, parents receive social services, including immigration, employment, and housing consultants. Social workers and mental health counselors are also on hand to serve students and their families. A primary health and dental clinic is on the premises.

After the official school day ends, the building stays open until 10 p.m. for educational enrichment, mentoring, sports, computer lab, music, arts, and entrepreneurial workshops. Teenagers are welcome to use the sports and arts facilities and to take classes along with adults on topics like English, computer work, and parenting skills. The school also stays open weekends and summers, offering the Dominican community many opportunities for cultural enrichment and family participation.

(Dryfoos, 1996, p. 20)

This vignette describes Intermediate School 218, a poor urban school in New York City that is one of the few community institutions still standing in its neighborhood. The vignette also describes a new trend in comprehensive educational reform that is increasingly becoming popular among school districts and schools in the United States. This narrative moreover, is descriptive of one school in which administrators have taken a holistic approach to education by offering its community members social services, community services, and by offering its students more than an academic education. The purpose of this paper is to examine how, in some schools, the community-school link is being redefined and to examine what researchers are writing in regards to schools that offer services to the community.

Introduction

It is undeniable that schools that exist in urban neighborhoods do not have advantages. Unequal educational opportunities haunt students in low-income schools. For example, as supported repeatedly throughout existing research, school achievement scores can be almost perfectly predicted by the socioeconomic status of children within the school (Traub, 2000). High student achievement scores are often associated with high and middle class levels, while low achievement scores are often associated with low socio-economic backgrounds. Lacking advantages, it would seem, limits the capacities of a vast majority of children that live in poverty to realize opportunities for learning.

As such, it is evident that schools do not exist within a vacuum. Life circumstances and educational attainments are irrefutably interconnected and interdependent. For example, many children that live in poor urban neighborhoods suffer high rates of malnutrition, prenatal and childhood disease, emotional trauma, neglect, and too often suffer from abuse (Newacheck, Jameson, and Halfon, 1994). These conditions affect the extents to which these children can realize an education.

For example, an examination of the health differences among poor and nonpoor children conducted by Newacheck, Jameson, and Halfon (1994) reported that youths from the lowest income backgrounds, as defined by an annual family income of less than or equal to $10,000, had significantly lower levels of visual acuity, lower levels of hearing sensitivity, were at twice the risk of experiencing tooth problems, had 50% more skin conditions, and had

significantly elevated blood lead levels in comparison to children from families with high incomes. Higher income families were defined by an annual family income greater than or equal to $35,000. Poor youth also had 32% more restricted activity days, 78% more bed days, 55% more days absent from school, and exhibited 38% more behavioral problems on average than children from families with high incomes. Maeroff (1998) elaborates further, stating that the devastation of poverty, the uncertainties of employment, violence and crime on the streets, forbidding parks, and even dangerous front yards complicate and threaten the lives of these youngsters. In these settings kids cannot help but atrophy. Furthermore, these circumstances directly affect the ways in which students experience schooling.

As such, the circumstances these students face at home and invariably bring with them to school and the challenges that accompany poverty are increasingly being accounted for by school and school district personnel. Some school administrators are trying to account for what happens inside and outside of the schoolhouse walls by providing support to students who live in these environments. These administrators are acknowledging that a child is an inseparable part of his or her environment and, according to Bronfenbrenner (1975), are beginning to concentrate on a child's *ecology* by compensating for the imbalances between the student and his/her surroundings.

These district and school personnel, in turn, are arguing that a more comprehensive vision of social change is needed and, consequently, are offering community and social service programs. They are acknowledging that schools

exist within larger socio-political contexts and are suggesting that in order to improve schools, and the educational experiences and achievements of students within schools, schools must account for a greater definition of a students' well-being.

For purposes of illustration, transferring a scientific principle offered by Van Horn (1989) may explain the ecological ideology these schools have adopted to better serve their students. Biologists frequently use the law of the least limiting factor that states that "the growth of an organism is limited by the variable that is in shortest supply, not by the variables that are in abundance" (p. 292). In other words, a child's academic achievements are directly affected by the needs that are not met in conditions of poverty. While school personnel attempt numerous reforms, a child's successes in school are restrained by the child's most basic needs. Likewise, student success in school can also be promoted by the variables in the child's life that schools work to make abundant. As such, school administrators that are providing necessary social services have fronted an attack, in a sustained way, in order to compensate for the side-effects of poverty so that children and families can surpass the hazardous factors that affect their lives and realize the educational opportunities to which they have access.

The purpose of this paper is to examine what is known in the scholarly literature about the extent to which the social services provided by schools, in actuality, are affecting education. Specifically, in this paper I attempt to come to an understanding about the extent to which schools that take an ecological

approach to schooling promote a sense of efficacy among the neediest children. Following is a brief historical discussion that will present some key moments in history and policy that have influenced the evolution of social service schools.

An Historical Overview of the School-Community Link

The concept of schools as community agents and social service providers is not new. As noted by Jehl and Kirst (1992) immigration in the early 1900's expanded the schools' social responsibilities by engaging schools in the assimilation of newcomers into the United States. The economic depression of the 1930s gave rise to school lunches, and the civil rights movement in the 1960s stimulated new school programs into existence that were intended to equalize educational opportunities "for all children, regardless of race" (p. 153).

In the 1980s, Jehl and Kirst (1992) add, hopes for comprehensive reform increased while the intensification of schools and the advancement of components of schooling (curriculum, workload, extended school hours) were viewed as less effective as these reforms were insufficiently taking into account the students' barriers to learning. At this point, in other words, reformers began to acknowledge that the environments the students were bringing with them to school were not being abandoned outside the schoolhouse door. Subsequently, in 1988 congress passed the Educational Partnerships Act to stimulate the creation and implementation of community partnerships in schools so that schools could increase their capacities to account for broader student needs. In the same vein, in 1990, Chief Justice Weilentz of the New Jersey Supreme Court wrote:

> there is solid agreement on the basic proposition that conventional education is totally inadequate to address the special problems of the urban poor. Something quite different is needed, something that deals not only with reading, writing, and arithmetic, but with the environment that shapes these students' lives and determines their educational needs (372)
>
> (Anyon, 1997, p. 182)

In the ensuing period of the 1990s, a majority of states provided start-up funds for school-based health programs. The federal government also created the national Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning and enacted the Improving America's Schools Act in order to promote community-based organizations in schools and parent involvement. Thereafter, states and local schools began to coordinate services between state agencies, local educational agencies, cities, counties, and communities.

Current Status

Through time, the role of American schools has expanded. Many school administrators now offer the health, social service, and social training functions traditionally associated with community organizations or social service agencies. According to Dryfoos (1996) and Davies (1991), full-service schools are becoming more visible and are providing quality educations in conjunction with support services that include health and welfare services, recreational programs, extended school programs, life-enhancing opportunities, family support services, and family education, for example education about nutrition and child care. Family-student relationships are also being fostered.

All over the country, states Dryfoos (1996), leaders involved with these "one-stop centers" are addressing the educational, physical, psychological, and

social needs of students and their families both rationally and holistically. Large-scale initiatives, for example federal programs like the free and reduced lunch program, the 21st Century Schools federal grants program, and granted initiatives funded by the Mott Foundation, have been enacted. Small-scale initiatives implemented by local schools and supported by schools and the community are also well underway in embracing school-aged children.

In fact, according to Tyack (1992), "few ideas have caught on in public education as rapidly or as widely as the notion that public schools and other social and health agencies should collaborate to provide more effective services for children" (Crowson and Boyd, 1993, p. 143). These school personnel, Crowson and Boyd (1993) suggest, are being driven by

> a sense of national crisis in the conditions of life for children in urban America...widespread evidence of reduced access to support services for families in inner-city environments...a renewed sense of the vital 'ecologies' of relationships between schools and their neighborhoods, a sense of the importance of complementary societal investments in the lives of children, and an appreciation of the benefits in child development of linking teaching and social services (p. 171)

According to these supporters, the needs for these types of services are commonsensical.

These programs are also becoming less unique and the varieties of programs being offered are diversifying. For example, Davies (1991) describes

Vaughn Elementary School in California stating it is a "one stop hub of social services for the family" (p.6). Vaughn Elementary personnel provide a family service center, parent education, employment training, immigration services, family resources, daycare, and organizes community block captains that link community members in need of assistance with professionals in events of domestic violence, for suicide counseling, and other social needs.

Comprehensive reforms vary, but the efforts are derived from the same concerns. It is hoped these programs will enjoy a tenure in urban educational reform because regardless of their effects on academic performance, they do help children.

Benefits Accrued

There are numerous benefits to using the school as a hub for community-based services. According to Gardner (1993) and Dryfoos (1996), one benefit is simply accrued by the fact that schools are the most logical care-takers of these students' special needs. As noted by Smrekar (1993), "schools provide the organizational context for the most sustained and ongoing contact with children outside the family setting" (p. 175). Schools have express access to their students and, as such, enjoy greater access than what is afforded the social service agencies traditionally attributed these responsibilities. Simply put, traditional forms of social service agencies exist in isolation in the community and are, therefore, limited in scope. Further, Gardner (1993) argues, the schools have better data on the children and simply know them better. Overall, these scholars argue, school personnel have the capacity to react more quickly to the

needs of students. Offering services on site can allow the children the attention needed immediately.

Capper (1994) notes another benefit in that school-community programs empower students and families to become involved in the community and in schooling. Jehl and Kirst (1992) commend these programs stating that "with families coming onto the campus frequently for services, [i.e., child-care classes] it is likely that parents will visit the classrooms more often, creating a much more family-oriented school as well as a greater potential for parent-teacher interaction" (p. 163). Further, through such programs parents and their children have increased opportunities to be together in the school environment and to share in the process of education.

These outreach programs also provide services that are more accessible to both the community at large and its residents. Furthermore, community residents, parents, school personnel, students, and others have input on services provided and service delivery. Whether community members volunteer time on site councils, community councils, accrue benefits from participation, or provide service-oriented schools with monetary or resource donations, community members, through some form of participation, embrace the community by engaging with these schools. Consequently, according to Capper (1994), community members are also more likely to engage in community improvements and are more likely to promote community pride. Most importantly, the empowerment of the participants, according to Capper (1994),

enables them to tailor services to meet the cultural, ethnic, and racial needs of their community.

Lastly, Maeroff (1998) suggests that these enhancement efforts are most necessary in that they "persist in their attempt to build social capital for children in need so that they will have something remotely resembling the support system that advantaged children enjoy as they pursue their education" (p. 431). She continues by arguing what these programs "attempt to accomplish happens with regularity in advantaged" neighborhoods and families, "where parents ensure that their children have every possible experience to bolster their sense of knowing" (p. 431). She contends these programs are invaluable and necessary. They are one part of providing students with equitable opportunities to learn.

There are many benefits to be gained from these programs. Even if these programs do not directly affect academic achievement, although limited research suggests they do, the opportunities these programs offer to children cannot be overlooked. They are, in fact, necessary to any child's well-being. The opportunities afforded children in these programs are invaluable. The opportunities are, however, limited by many roadblocks as well.

Barriers to Success

Radical critics of these outreach programs argue that regardless of their vastness, these programs do not go far enough. According to Adler (1997), these programs do not induce radical changes in communities because they do not effectively compensate for the communities' weak economic bases. Porter (1994), as cited in Adler (1997), states that jobs and fruitful economic

opportunities must precede new social programs because, without a stronger economic base, these programs will ultimately fail, lacking financial resources for prolonged sustainability. In consideration of the ways in which full-service schools are currently operating, the services provided are not integrated enough, nor are they comprehensive enough, to initiate grand economic changes in the greater community.

In another vein, conservative critics note that schools should not be responsible for anything but learning. These critics believe schools exist to provide an education to students and to build "character," but should not be held accountable for health and other social services. These other services should be left to social service agencies and professionals, and they should not, therefore, be included in the responsibilities already given to school administrators. These critics, according to Jehl and Kirst (1992), also argue that these social services, particularly day care, should be discouraged in that they will encourage more women to work and will enable more women to hold full-time jobs. These services, according to these critics, will contribute more so to the continual deconstruction of the family core.

Other critics note governance issues as barriers to community-school link successes. According to Dryfoos (1996), "the more complex the model, the more demanding the administrative arrangements" (p. 21-22). School leaders already organize and administer a great number of services, and adding to the list of responsibilities by integrating outreach services has great implications for the quality of the administration, and the quality, of these programs. Further

governance barriers include difficulties when organizing personnel and restructuring personnel roles and responsibilities outside of a school's traditional system, an issue Crowson and Boyd (1993) term "bureaucratic intractability." Questions regarding who is in charge and to whom others should report become complicated, but more so, general bureaucratic mechanisms are likely, these critics suggest, to impede on the capacities of these programs to create change. Without changing the bureaucratic mechanisms that structure these schools, they contend, effective social service integration will be circumscribed.

Dryfoos (1996) adds that "turf" is also a major barrier. The question of who owns the school building or room in which community-based organizations offer their services in schools is debatable and can interfere with the progress and quality of the implemented programs. As noted by Gardner (1993), simply finding space on the school site is also a challenge in itself.

Politics are an issue according to Gardner (1993) whereas funders, because they fund certain projects, feel they have ownership and legislative say over the projects. More commonly however, Gardner (1993) states, in other programs school leaders tend to step forward and take ownership over the interagency partnerships. When this happens, regardless of the level of involvement of the community-based partner, the partner usually steps back and allows the school leader to take the lead. In other words, defining the nature of the leadership roles of both partners is a complicated matter; hence, asymmetries in programmatic control may disrupt partnering entirely. Leadership incongruencies defeat the ideal partnership. Inevitably then, Gardner (1993)

states, the community partners reduce the project to "that school project" and denounce the partnership. According to Gardner (1993) "a system that needs to be co-equal in mobilizing resources from many agencies becomes merely unilateral" (p.148).

Stakeholder issues are also noted as barriers to these types of innovation. Crowson and Boyd (1993) note that teachers tend to undervalue and claim ascendancy over "such 'ancillary' professionals as social workers, nurses, child-protection workers, community-relations representatives, recreation specialists, and librarians" (p. 167). Jehl and Kirst (1992) add that in the past, "teachers have typically communicated with outside agencies only in times of crisis" (p. 161), so it is difficult for teachers, they argue, to respect the roles these service agents may play in schools. Further, Crowson and Boyd (1993) suggest that teachers "may perceive few benefits from involvement in coordinated services because of their tradition of isolated autonomy and their sense of already being overburdened with responsibilities" (p. 162). Further, parents are to be valued as stakeholders, defined by Crowson and Boyd (1993), "but are seldom offered incentives beyond a chance to participate in program governance or to receive program services" (p. 162). The extent to which parents are involved in these programs is still limited. The only disadvantages apparent in the literature for student stakeholders were noted by Gardner (1993) in that students are susceptible in that these programs "stigmatize at-risk students" (p.147). As such, the ways in which the service providers target students for services must be deliberately and purposefully planned with care. For example, schools that are

not purposeful in the ways in which they recruit students for participation in these programs routinely serve students that need the services least. Other schools that deliberately recruit students and families most in need of such services, seem to be more effective. Personnel running these programs are methodical and conscious of the manners in which limited resources are distributed.

One of the largest issues confronting the successes of these programs is sustainability. According to Gardner (1993), "if funding is restricted to short-term, nonrecurring funds, funding issues will come up each year and may threaten the stability of the whole effort" (p.148). Likewise, these programs are costly to fund and as such, are commonly susceptible to budget cuts.

Finally, one last barrier relates to the extent to which these programs are integrated throughout the school. Crowson and Boyd (1993) argue that "it remains a reality that services for children in schools and in the community at large are far more likely to be fragmented and independent than coordinated and complementary" (p. 160). They further argue that "add-on efforts," do not sufficiently supplement the school. Gardner (1993) adds that "additive projects cannot change institutions, because they operate as new activities grafted on top of the existing system. School-linked services are especially at risk of becoming additive, because they often develop out of a perceived need to address the problems of at-risk youth" (Gardner, 1993, p.142).

Discussion

So far in this paper, an historical synopsis of the community-school linked program has been offered along with basic tenets of how and why these

programs exist. Furthermore, the benefits accrued from these programs and the barriers to their success have been presented. It is my purpose in the last section of this paper to discuss what is empirically known about the effects of community-school programs and to discuss the implications of what is known for further action in the area of comprehensive urban school reform research.

The results of studies conducted thus far on community-school programs are mixed. Some studies suggest these programs are truly enhancing the lives of students and positively affecting academic achievement. One study, as cited by Dryfoos (1996), illustrates that schools that offered health clinics reduced instances of substance abuse, reduced dropout rates, and increased student attendance. Dryfoos (1996) further states that in schools that offered reproductive health services, student birth rates lowered. Finally, he notes "students, parents, teachers, and school personnel report[ed] a high level of satisfaction with school-based services and particularly appreciate[d] their accessibility, convenience, and confidentiality" (p. 22). Researchers in another study which was conducted on comprehensive schools and cited by Dryfoos (1996), also concluded that attendance and graduation rates increased significantly and that reading and math scores also improved in conjunction with the implementation of these programs. Finally, the Carnegie Corporation found that these schools were "stimulating, nurturing, and respectful of cultural values. Parents [we]re heavily involved as classroom aides, and advisory board members, in classes and cultural events, and with case managers and support services. Property destruction and graffiti ha[d] diminished, and neighborhood

violence rates ha[d] definitely decreased" (as cited in Dryfoos, 1996, p. 23). Lastly, according to Jehl and Kirst (1992), parents in these schools "trusted the school and saw it as a safe place for them and their children" (p. 163).

In Robert Stake's (1986) book Quieting Reform, Stake, a highly esteemed evaluator, evaluates the Cities in Schools federally funded program. Stake found that these community outreach programs were more or less underimpressive in that no statistically significant changes were found nor were effects uncovered that could have been directly correlated to the implementation of Cities in Schools programs. According to Crowson and Boyd (1993), Stake found "little evidence that Cities in Schools had been successful in integrating services, in measurably affecting youth, or in overcoming discrepancies between a launch-the-program rhetoric and a far-different reality of program operation" (Crowson and Boyd, 1993, p 153). Conversely, according to Crowson and Boyd (1993), Stake discounts his own findings in this book due to the quantitative nature of inquiry he used to conduct the study. So although these findings seem conclusive, Stake argues, the difficulties in studying these programs in isolation of the socio-political contexts in which these programs are situated threatened the validity of this study.

As such, in light of the controversial and inconclusive nature of these findings, needs for further research are evident. While comprehensive programs are becoming more fruitful, scholars suggest more extensive research needs to be conducted. Jehl and Kirst (1992) suggest that in order to judge the merits of these programs attendance and retention effects need to be studied, health

outcomes need to be gauged, and family and parent involvement variables need to be examined. Furthermore, the overall effects on students, their senses of efficacy and empowerment are in need of examination.

Whether or not these programs are directly related to achievement gains is arguable and more or less unknown. What is commonsensical, however, is that these programs do help children. A school that has the capacity to offer a child a root canal or a school that has the capacity to support a grocery store on campus cannot produce, it seems, ill effects. Studies are still needed, however, to test these hypotheses.

Conclusion

According to Davies (1991), "only an ecological approach is likely to succeed...an ecological solution to an ecological disaster" (p.5). Trying to fix inner-city schools without accounting for the ecological environments in which the students that attend these schools are situated borders on absurdity. As I have argued, urban schools cannot exist independent from the influences children bring with them from outside the school house walls. Urban school administrators need to account for the ecological well-being of the student by acknowledging that what happens outside of school permeates everything that happens in school. In order for schools to succeed in "reforming" education for the poor, school personnel must come to an understanding that some variables in a child's life are not solvable by reading, writing, and arithmetic alone.

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